



A Northwest thriller

'Cut by Cut' offers a twisting take on a fictional film scene

If you're looking for a noir thriller to match the wintry mood of the season, you need look no further than Patricia Vaccarino's take on the unsavory side of commercial film and video production in her latest novel, "Cut by Cut."

The author, who splits her time between Manzanita and Seattle, chose the latter as the setting for this dark tale of sex, violence, power, betrayal and incessant rain.

Taking place over the course of one stormy Thursday in November, the circadian novel unfolds over a set of chapters and scenes told out of sequence, though each chapter is marked by time code, a system used by filmmakers to synchronize coordination of time-based media. So as Vaccarino delivers this story in disjointed fragments, told from different viewpoints over the course of 24 hours, the careful reader can use the time codes to piece together a chronology of the machinations of Seattle's chaotic film community, and the crime that occurs within it.

Here are some of the puzzle pieces:

Mia Hill has repeating nightmares of her abusive husband's murder, but no one she can really talk to except her housekeeper.

Commercial director Harry Hill, who cuts a larger-than-life swath through Seattle's film community, has no time for Mia's nonsense, no time for his kids, no time for his neurotic producer, and not enough time for sleep.

Editor Kenny Kix has no love for egotistical directors.

Ad agency owner Ray Wachtel has no love for his neurotic wife.

Producer Wendy Wachtel has both a faithless business partner and a faithless husband to contend with.

Film stylist Jewell Cleary and

grip Steve Olin have outsized ambitions.

Restaurateur Susan Kauffman is the self-styled faux mama of the local film industry.

And who is Sollie Berg – a media mogul, or a shrink?

This week's book

'Cut by Cut' by Patricia Vaccarino

Modus Operandi Books – 292 pp — \$14.95

Before 24 hours is up, two of these players will be murdered, and most of the others will become suspects – at least in the reader's mind.

The novel toys with our conceptions of reality. As we see through the warped lens of each character's experience, can there really be such a thing as a reliable narrator? Whose version of the story can we trust? And as we get pulled into the lives of these people, who traffic in the business of advertising and psychological manipulation, might we extrapolate cautionary lessons for our own lives?

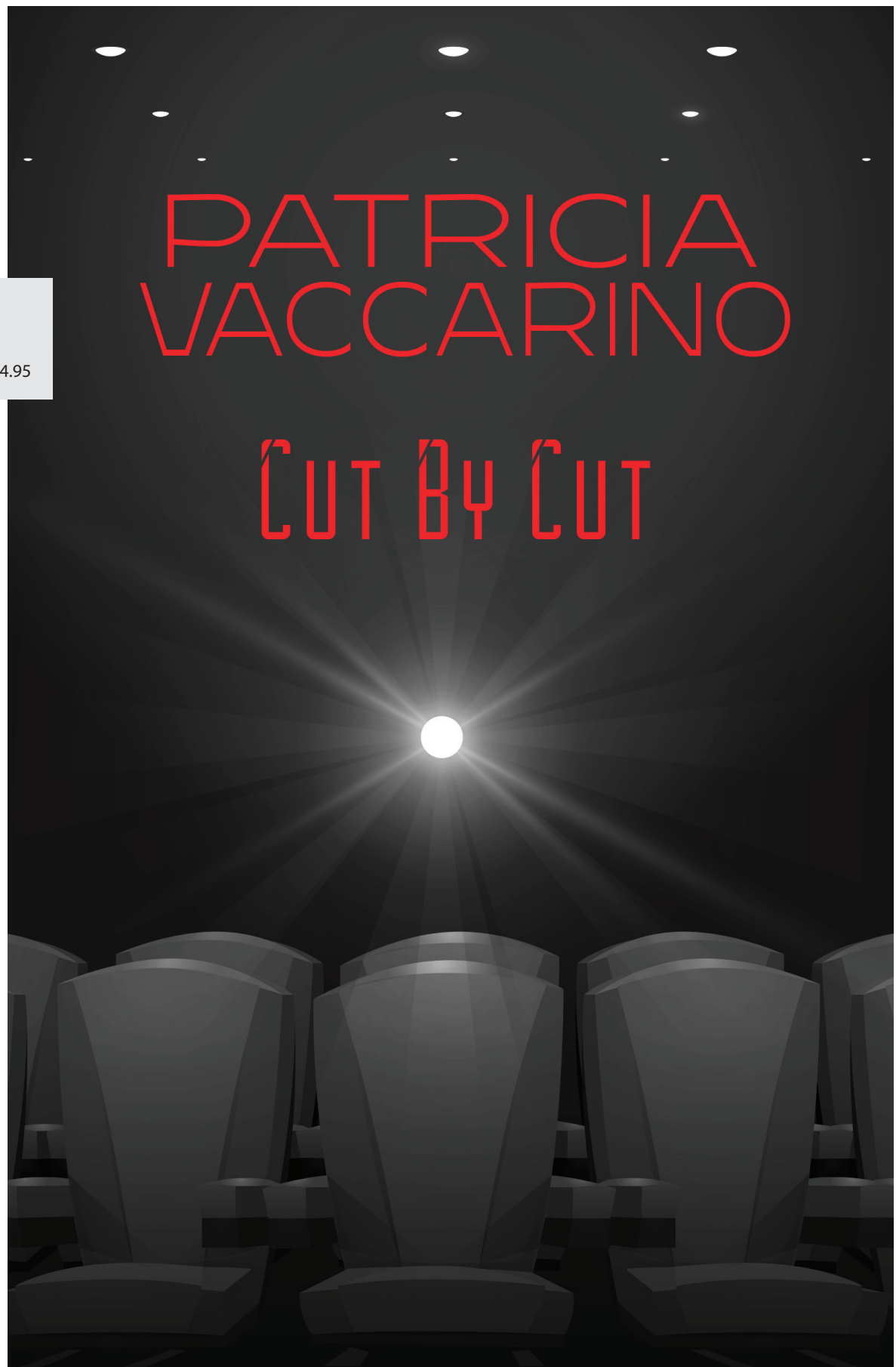
Vaccarino also plays with the ambiguity of the "Cut by Cut" title. Who is doing the cutting, and what is getting cut? There are haircuts, film cuts, cutting edge

styles, self-harm cutting – and the cutting short of lives.

There is graphic seduction and sex in this novel, as well as graphic violence. There is coarse language. And, as the author tells it, while the film industry may deliver a nice and shiny final product, the behind-the-scenes story is not for the faint of heart. This is a cutthroat business. "Cut by Cut" is both a gruesome and an engrossing whodunit.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at barbaralmcm@gmail.com.

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